



**THE TRUTH
ABOUT**

MANAGING PEOPLE

“Proven Insights to
Get the Best From
Your Team.”

Stephen P. Robbins

World's best-selling management and organizational behavior author

THE TRUTH ABOUT MANAGING PEOPLE

Proven Insights to
Get the Best from Your Team

4TH EDITION

Stephen P. Robbins, Ph.D.

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing December 2014

ISBN-10: 0-13-404843-1

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-404843-7

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2014950819

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For my wife, Laura

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Preface

There has never been a shortage of “how to” books to help managers get the most from their human resources. Managers have long been bombarded with advice from consultants, professors, business journalists, and assorted management “gurus” on how to manage their employees. Unfortunately, much of this advice is a gross generalization, based more on opinions rather than fact. The exceptions tend to be overly complicated, long-winded presentations, containing a lot of theory but not much practical advice.

The Truth About Managing People was created to fill the need for a clearly written, practical guide to managing human resources, built on solid evidence rather than opinion. As someone who has been teaching and writing about managing people at work for more than 45 years, I have pulled from thousands of research studies to create a unique source for managers and manager-wannabes.

This book is designed to be a short, concise summary of behavioral research. It cuts through the jargon to give managers the truth about what works and doesn't work when it comes to managing people at work. As with the previous editions, I've organized this book around key, human-behavior-related problem areas that managers face: hiring, motivation, leadership, communication, team building, conflict management, performance evaluation, and coping with change. Within each problem area, I've identified a select set of topics that are relevant to managers and where there is substantive research evidence to draw upon. I've also included suggestions to help readers apply this information to improve their managerial effectiveness. Seven topics are new to this edition, while the research and examples in the others have been updated. **New to this edition are the following topics: the importance of people skills, emotional intelligence, employee engagement, mentoring, when teams are appropriate, deviant workplace behaviors, and creating creative employees.**

Who was this book written for? Practicing managers and those aspiring to a management position—from CEOs to supervisor wannabes. I wrote it because I believe you shouldn't have to read through detailed textbooks in human resources or organizational behavior to learn the truth about managing people at work. Nor should you have to attend an executive development course at a prestigious university to get the straight facts. What you get from this book, of course, will depend on your current knowledge about organizational behavior. Recent MBAs, for instance, will find this book to be a concise summary of the evidence they spent many months studying. They won't see elaborated theories or names of major researchers, but they will find accurate translations of research findings. For individuals who haven't kept current with research in organizational behavior or for those with little formal academic training, this book should provide new insights into managing people at work.

Each of the 62 topics in this book is given its own short chapter. And each chapter is essentially independent from the others. You can read them in any order you want. Best of all, you needn't tackle this book in one sitting. It's been designed for multiple "quick reads." Read a few chapters, put it down, then pick it up again at a later date. There's no continuous story line that has to be maintained.

Let me conclude this preface by stating the obvious: A book is a team project. While there is only one name on the cover, a number of people contributed to getting this book in your hands. That team included Charlotte Maiorana, Amy Neidlinger, Jodi Kemper, Elaine Wiley, Kristy Hart, Geneil Breeze, Alan Clements, Chuck Hutchinson, and Gloria Schurick.



Stephen P. Robbins

PART I: THE TRUTH ABOUT HIRING

TRUTH

1

The Importance of
“People Skills”

Is there any “critical ingredient” for achieving success as a manager? Is it an MBA from Harvard or Stanford universities? How about specific technical expertise in one’s area of competence like law, computer engineering, or accounting? The answer to our question is “yes, there is a critical ingredient to success,” and it’s good interpersonal or “people” skills. Technical skills may be a necessary qualification for a job, but they’re rarely sufficient. Possession of competent interpersonal skills increasingly plays a major role in deciding who is hired, who is retained, and who is promoted.

What defines interpersonal skills? Although there is no universal agreement, most definitions include oral communication, leadership, motivating others, negotiating, resolving conflicts, and collaboration. In addition to these face-to-face interactions, the term also is expanding to include virtual interactions such as leading virtual teams and electronic communications.

Organizations place a premium on hiring people with good interpersonal skills.

Study after study has consistently found that organizations place a premium on hiring people with good interpersonal skills. Here are some examples:

- When 1,400 chief financial officers in the United States were asked “If two candidates interviewing for an accounting or finance position had similar skills, which of the following would you find most valuable—technical knowledge, people skills, industry-specific knowledge, advanced degree, multilingual skills, or international experience?” The overwhelming first choice was people skills.
- A survey of 330 employers found 96 percent rated communication and interpersonal skills as the most valuable employee trait.
- A survey of more than 500 European business leaders from 32 European countries rated effective interpersonal skills a far more important quality in potential employees than a strong academic degree or business acumen.

Why are organizations putting a premium on hiring people with good interpersonal skills? The answer lies in the changing way work is done. Today’s employees are increasingly part of a collaborative workplace. Increased collaboration requires increased interaction with others, and successful interaction with others is dependent on interpersonal competence. In addition to interacting with their boss, employees find themselves increasingly as part of a team. And as team members, they have to participate in meetings, communicate clearly, be active listeners, provide feedback, make presentations, negotiate with others, and demonstrate they can be team players. Finally, many employees are expected to work with customers, suppliers, and others outside the organization. No matter how good their technical knowledge, if these people can’t work well with others, their job performance suffers.

Today’s employees are increasingly part of a collaborative workplace.

What’s important for employees in general is even more important for those in managerial positions or those aspiring to a management position. Studies of successful managers—those with high-performing employees and low employee turnover—consistently indicate that they have good interpersonal skills. For instance, a national survey of the U.S. workforce found that wages and fringe benefits are not the primary reasons people like their jobs or stay with an employer. Far more important are the quality of the employees’ jobs and the supportiveness of their work environments. So managers with good interpersonal skills are likely to make the workplace more pleasant, which, in turn, makes it easier to hire and retain qualified people.

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